

Keep on top of domain name status



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It is shocking that half of the people or organizations with dot-ca domain names have not bothered to re-register them, as they are required to do under the new Canadian domain name system.

We might actually see several tens of thousands of dot-ca domain names disappear in the next few weeks. Maybe that will finally get the attention of the owners.

But maybe it shouldn't be surprising, given the large number of high-profile domain name foul-ups

that have occurred over the years. Lots of people laughed a year ago when Microsoft almost lost the microsoft.com domain name.

It turns out that someone at the company didn't pay the \$35 (U.S.) annual re-registration fee. A "good Samaritan" happened to notice the expiration, and paid for the renewal on his credit card. Microsoft eventually said thank you, but only after the incident was widely reported in the media.

We shouldn't laugh at Microsoft, though. Many companies don't pay proper attention to what is going on with their domain names, whether it's an imminent expiration, the prospect of competitors registering similar-sounding domain names, or the use of names that infringe on copyrights or trademarks.

And the dot-ca confusion certainly underlines the fact that many

people are setting themselves up for a potentially massive problem with poor domain name management. Their corporate Web sites and e-mail addresses are about to disappear off the face of the earth.

The fact is, domain name management can be a big problem for companies that have many different names. These firms have been busy registering their corporate names, the names of trademarked products, and countless other labels that might be useful to their on-line cause.

Responsibility for the effort might be spread out among multiple departments or individuals. It doesn't help matters when the renewal dates on these names might be staggered throughout the year. It's tough to keep track of what is going on.

It's an ugly mess out there, and confusion is rampant. I've come to

realize that many people — particularly entrepreneurs — are completely mystified on how they got their domain name in the first place. They don't know where it was registered, or what they would have to do if changes with their domain were necessary.

I've recently been helping a friend who is a painter. Years ago, she registered a domain name for her company, and had a Web site developed, but it was all done by a Web developer. That person has long since moved on.

It took a fair bit of investigation to actually figure out where her domain was registered, find the passwords and other account information that are necessary, and determine how it was set up. I've just received a message from her saying that her site is down. I'll have to dig more deeply to clear up the mystery.

Such a situation is not unusual. Everyone with an interest in a domain name has to take a more aggressive role in managing his or her domain. Fortunately, some services on-line can help you. Consider, for example, NameProtect (www.nameprotect.com). It provides a useful free service that allows you to keep up-to-date on what is going on with the domain names that you own.

Simply register with the service, provide a list of your domain names, and you're all set up.

The service will now do several things. First, it will provide you with advance notification of forthcoming expiration dates of your site names.

Second, it will allow you to quickly assess if there are potential threats to your domain name. Each month, the service automatically examines new U.S.-based trade-

mark applications and domain name registrations in the dot-com, dot-net and dot-org and various country codes. It lets you know of any that are identical or very similar to your site name.

This will help determine if you need to take some action to protect your own domain name. Right now, it only scans major domains, but someone is bound to come up with a similar Canadian service.

Your domain name is one of your most important resources — without it, your corporate or personal Web site disappears from the planet.

Isn't it about time that you paid proper attention to safeguarding it?

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